



A.J. Herrera

October 22, 2014



As the players from Los Alamos High School's girls varsity soccer team race toward the goal of Albuquerque's Del Norte Knights in the early evening of October 7, 2014, head coach Angelo (A.J.) Herrera, by day a financial analyst in the Laboratory's Chief Financial Officer Division, paces along the sideline, shouting quick, friendly instructions and words of encouragement. "Well done," he yells, smiling, as his Los Alamos team scores their first goal in the game's 26th minute, followed 45 seconds later by a second one.

Not everyone watching the game at Sullivan Field may recognize Herrera as the soccer celebrity he is in his own right. Herrera competed nationally and internationally as a team member of the U.S. Youth National Soccer Team from 1996 to 2000, including the Youth Olympics in Moscow in 1997. He earned his undergraduate degree on a soccer scholarship from the University of Maryland and has been coaching soccer in a variety of settings since returning to New Mexico in 2004.

Herrera's wife Natalia with their children

By half-time the Los Alamos girls have scored another impressive goal in the fading evening light, followed by two more after the break for a final 5-0 victory.

But the thrill of winning is only part of why Herrera loves to play and coach soccer. "Soccer is a family affair to me," Herrera says. "I became passionate about the sport as a toddler while watching my sister play in our home town of Albuquerque, and today it's a way for my wife, Natalia, and our three kids to spend time together and get to know other families. Soccer gives us a reason and a way to be part of a larger community."

Extending a helping hand on and off the field

Herrera is grateful for the encouragement and many kindnesses he received in the course of his soccer career and wants to return the favor by being a passionate and dedicated coach. He hopes to make a difference not only in his players' lives but in the community that surrounds them, and his wife shares his dedication and vision.

"Natalia is my rock," Herrera explains. "She understands and supports the time and effort it takes to run a successful soccer program, and she directly impacts the players as well. When I coached the Santa Fe High School's boys soccer team, for example, she took two boys who wanted to join under her wing and tutored them in geometry for a whole summer so they could take a geometry test and meet the school's academic requirements in time for the fall season."

The soccer community in turn has helped Herrera's family by welcoming them into their midst. "It's neat," Herrera notes, "to see the parents and siblings of players help Natalia take care of our kids during practice or a game. There's usually at least one eight- or nine-year-old who loves playing with Diego, who is five now, and our three-year-old twins, Jocelyn and Kayla."

Herrera has high hopes for his soccer players and is confident that the game will enrich their lives. "Soccer has taken me to places I never dreamed of, both geographically and on a personal level," he says. "It's shaped my character, given me a wide network of friends and offered skills that I can use for the rest of my life. I'd like the same for my teams."

Herrera works for the Chief Financial Officer Division's Budgeting group.

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